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THE AGNOSTIC'S SIDE.*

BY ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

"Doubt is called the beacon of the wise."

MY DEAR MR. FIELD:

I ANSWER your letter because it is manly, candid and generous. It is not often that a minister of the gospel of universal benevolence speaks of an unbeliever except in terms of reproach, contempt and hatred. The meek are often malicious. The statement in your letter, that some of your brethren look upon me as a monster on account of my unbelief, tends to show that those who love God are not always the friends of their fellow men.

Is it not strange that people who admit that they ought to be eternally damned, that they are by nature totally depraved, and that there is no soundness or health in them, can be so arrogantly egotistic as to look upon others as "monsters?" And yet "some of your brethren," who regard unbelievers as infamous, rely for salvation entirely on the goodness of another, and expect to receive as alms an eternity of joy.

*This article was published in the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW in November, 1887, in reply to an open letter addressed to Colonel Ingersoll by the Rev. Dr. Henry M. Field and published in the REVIEW in August of the same year.—EDITOR N. A. R.

The first question that arises between us, is as to the innocence of honest error—as to the right to express an honest thought.

You must know that perfectly honest men differ on many important subjects. Some believe in free trade, others are the advocates of protection. There are honest Democrats and sincere Republicans. How do you account for these differences? Educated men, presidents of colleges, cannot agree upon questions capable of solution—questions that the mind can grasp, concerning which the evidence is open to all and where the facts can be with accuracy ascertained. How do you explain this? If such differences can exist consistently with the good faith of those who differ, can you not conceive of honest people entertaining different views on subjects about which nothing can be positively known?

You do not regard me as a monster. "Some of your brethren" do. How do you account for this difference? Of course, your brethren—their hearts having been softened by the Presbyterian God—are governed by charity and love. They do not regard me as a monster because I have committed an infamous crime, but simply for the reason that I have expressed my honest thoughts.

What should I have done? I have read the Bible with great care, and the conclusion has forced itself upon my mind not only that it is not inspired, but that it is not true. Was it my duty to speak or act contrary to this conclusion? Was it my duty to remain silent? If I had been untrue to myself, if I had joined the majority—if I had declared the book to be the inspired word of God—would your brethren still have regarded me as a monster? Has religion had control of the world so long that an honest man seems monstrous?

According to your creed—according to your Bible—the same Being who made the mind of man, who fashioned every brain, and sowed within those wondrous fields the seeds of every thought and deed, inspired the Bible's every word, and gave it as a guide to all the world. Surely the book should satisfy the brain. And yet, there are millions who do not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Some of the greatest and best have held the claim of inspiration in contempt. No Presbyterian ever stood higher in the realm of thought than Humboldt. He was familiar with

Nature from sands to stars, and gave his thoughts, his discoveries and conclusions, "more precious than the tested gold," to all mankind. Yet he not only rejected the religion of your brethren, but denied the existence of their God. Certainly, Charles Darwin was one of the greatest and purest of men,—as free from prejudice as the mariner's compass,—desiring only to find amid the mists and clouds of ignorance the star of truth. No man ever exerted a greater influence on the intellectual world. His discoveries, carried to their legitimate conclusion, destroy the creeds and sacred scriptures of mankind. In the light of "Natural Selection," "The Survival of the Fittest," and "The Origin of Species," even the Christian religion becomes a gross and cruel superstition. Yet Darwin was an honest, thoughtful, brave and generous man.

Compare, I beg of you, these men, Humboldt and Darwin, with the founders of the Presbyterian Church. Read the life of Spinoza, the loving pantheist, and then that of John Calvin, and tell me, candidly, which, in your opinion, was a "monster." Even your brethren do not claim that men are to be eternally punished for having been mistaken as to the truth of geology, astronomy, or mathematics. A man may deny the rotundity and rotation of the earth, laugh at the attraction of gravitation, scout the nebular hypothesis, and hold the multiplication table in abhorrence, and yet join at last the angelic choir. I insist upon the same freedom of thought in all departments of human knowledge. Reason is the supreme and final test.

If God has made a revelation to man, it must have been addressed to his reason. There is no other faculty that could even decipher the address. I admit that reason is a small and feeble flame, a flickering torch by stumblers carried in the starless night,—blown and flared by passion's storm,—and yet it is the only light. Extinguish that, and nought remains.

You draw a distinction between what you are pleased to call "superstition" and religion. You are shocked at the Hindoo mother when she gives her child to death at the supposed command of her God. What do you think of Abraham, of Jephthah? What is your opinion of Jehovah himself? Is not the sacrifice of a child to a phantom as horrible in Palestine as in India? Why should a God demand a sacrifice from man? Why should the infinite ask anything from the finite? Should the sun beg of the

glow-worm, and should the momentary spark excite the envy of the source of light?

You must remember that the Hindoo mother believes that her child will be forever blest—that it will become the especial care of the God to whom it has been given. This is a sacrifice through a false belief on the part of the mother. She breaks her heart for the love of her babe. But what do you think of the Christian mother who expects to be happy in heaven, with her child a convict in the eternal prison—a prison in which none die, and from which none escape? What do you say of those Christians who believe that they, in heaven, will be so filled with ecstasy that all the loved of earth will be forgotten—that all the sacred relations of life, and all the passions of the heart, will fade and die, so that they will look with stony, unreplying, happy eyes upon the miseries of the lost?

You have laid down a rule by which superstition can be distinguished from religion. It is this: "It makes that a crime which is not a crime, and that a virtue which is not a virtue." Let us test your religion by this rule.

Is it a crime to investigate, to think, to reason, to observe? Is it a crime to be governed by that which to you is evidence, and is it infamous to express your honest thought? There is also another question: Is credulity a virtue? Is the open mouth of ignorant wonder the only entrance to Paradise?

According to your creed, those who believe are to be saved, and those who do not believe are to be eternally lost. When you condemn men to everlasting pain for unbelief, that is to say, for acting in accordance with that which is evidence to them—do you not make that a crime which is not a crime? And when you reward men with an eternity of joy for simply believing that which happens to be in accord with their minds, do you not make that a virtue which is not a virtue? In other words, do you not bring your own religion exactly within your own definition of superstition?

The truth is, that no one can justly be held responsible for his thoughts. The brain thinks without asking our consent. We believe, or we disbelieve, without an effort of the will. Belief is a result. It is the effect of evidence upon the mind. The scales turn in spite of him who watches. There is no opportunity of being honest or dishonest in the formation of an opinion. The

conclusion is entirely independent of desire. We must believe, or we must doubt, in spite of what we wish.

That which must be, has the right to be.

We think in spite of ourselves. The brain thinks as the heart beats, as the eyes see, as the blood pursues its course in the old accustomed ways.

The question then is, not have we the right to think,—that being a necessity,—but have we the right to express our honest thoughts? You certainly have the right to express yours, and you have exercised that right. Some of your brethren, who regard me as a monster, have expressed theirs. The question now is, have I the right to express mine? In other words, have I the right to answer your letter? To make that a crime in me which is a virtue in you, certainly comes within your definition of superstition. To exercise a right yourself which you deny to me is simply the act of a tyrant. Where did you get your right to express your honest thoughts? When, and where, and how did I lose mine?

You would not burn, you would not even imprison me, because I differ with you on a subject about which neither of us knows anything. To you the savagery of the Inquisition is only a proof of the depravity of man. You are far better than your creed. You believe that even the Christian world is outgrowing the frightful feeling that fagot, and dungeon, and thumb-screw are legitimate arguments, calculated to convince those upon whom they are used, that the religion of those who use them was founded by a God of infinite compassion. You will admit that he who now persecutes for opinion's sake is infamous. And yet, the God you worship will, according to your creed, torture through all the endless years the man who entertains an honest doubt. A belief in such a God is the foundation and cause of all religious persecution. You may reply that only the belief in a false God causes believers to be inhuman. But you must admit that the Jews believed in the true God, and you are forced to say that they were so malicious, so cruel, so savage, that they crucified the only Sinless Being who ever lived. This crime was committed, not in spite of their religion, but in accordance with it. They simply obeyed the command of Jehovah. And the followers of this Sinless Being, who, for all these centuries, have denounced the cruelty of the Jews for crucifying a man on account of his opinion,

have destroyed millions and millions of their fellow men for differing with them. And this same Sinless Being threatens to torture in eternal fire countless myriads for the same offence. Beyond this, inconsistency cannot go. At this point absurdity becomes infinite.

Your creed transfers the Inquisition to another world, making it eternal. Your God becomes, or rather is, an infinite Torquemada, who denies to his countless victims even the mercy of death. And this you call "a consolation."

You insist that at the foundation of every religion is the idea of God. According to your creed, all ideas of God, except those entertained by those of your faith, are absolutely false. You are not called upon to defend the Gods of the nations dead, nor the Gods of heretics. It is your business to defend the God of the Bible—the God of the Presbyterian Church. When in the ranks doing battle for your creed, you must wear the uniform of your Church. You dare not say that it is sufficient to insure the salvation of a soul to believe in *a* god, or in *some* god. According to your creed, man must believe in *your* God. All the nations dead believed in Gods, and all the worshippers of Zeus, and Jupiter, and Isis, and Osiris, and Brahma prayed and sacrificed in vain. Their petitions were not answered, and their souls were not saved. Surely you do not claim that it is sufficient to believe in any one of the heathen gods.

What right have you to occupy the position of the deists, and to put forth arguments that even Christians have answered? The deist denounced the God of the Bible because of his cruelty, and at the same time lauded the God of Nature. The Christian replied that the God of Nature was as cruel as the God of the Bible. This answer was complete.

I feel that you are entitled to the admission that none have been, that none are, too ignorant, too degraded, to believe in the supernatural; and I freely give you the advantage of this admission. Only a few—and they among the wisest, noblest, and purest of the human race—have regarded all gods as monstrous myths. Yet a belief in "the true God" does not seem to make men charitable or just. For most people, theism is the easiest solution of the universe. They are satisfied with saying that there must be a Being who created and who governs the world. But the universality of a belief does not tend to establish its truth.

The belief in the existence of a malignant Devil has been as universal as the belief in a beneficent God, yet few intelligent men will say that the universality of this belief in an infinite demon even tends to prove his existence. In the world of thought, majorities count for nothing. Truth has always dwelt with the few.

Man has filled the world with impossible monsters, and he has been the sport and prey of these phantoms born of ignorance and hope and fear. To appease the wrath of these monsters man has sacrificed his fellow man. He has shed the blood of wife and child; he has fasted and prayed; he has suffered beyond the power of language to express, and yet he has received nothing from these gods—they have heard no supplication, they have answered no prayer.

You may reply that your God “sends his rain on the just and on the unjust,” and that this fact proves that he is merciful to all alike. I answer, that your God sends his pestilence on the just and on the unjust—that his earthquakes devour and his cyclones rend and wreck the loving and the vicious, the honest and the criminal. Do not these facts prove that your God is cruel to all alike? In other words, do they not demonstrate the absolute impartiality of the divine negligence?

Do you not believe that any honest man of average intelligence, having absolute control of the rain, could do vastly better than is being done? Certainly there would be no droughts or floods; the crops would not be permitted to wither and die, while rain was being wasted in the sea. Is it conceivable that a good man with power to control the winds would not prevent cyclones? Would you not rather trust a wise and honest man with the lightning?

Why should an infinitely wise and powerful God destroy the good and preserve the vile? Why should he treat all alike here, and in another world make an infinite difference? Why should your God allow his worshippers, his adorers, to be destroyed by his enemies? Why should he allow the honest, the loving, the noble, to perish at the stake? Can you answer these questions? Does it not seem to you that your God must have felt a touch of shame when the poor slave mother—one that had been robbed of her babe—knelt and with clasped hands, in a voice broken with sobs, commenced her prayer with the words “Our Father?”

It gave me pleasure to find that, notwithstanding your creed, you are philosophical enough to say that some men are incapacitated, by reason of temperament, for believing in the existence of God. Now, if a belief in God is necessary to the salvation of the soul, why should God create a soul without this capacity? Why should he create souls that he knew would be lost? You seem to think that it is necessary to be poetical, or dreamy, in order to be religious, and by inference, at least, you deny certain qualities to me that you deem necessary. Do you account for the atheism of Shelley by saying that he was not poetic, and do you quote his lines to prove the existence of the very God whose being he so passionately denied? Is it possible that Napoleon—one of the most infamous of men—had a nature so finely strung that he was sensitive to the divine influences? Are you driven to the necessity of proving the existence of one tyrant by the words of another? Personally, I have but little confidence in a religion that satisfied the heart of a man who, to gratify his ambition, filled half the world with widows and orphans. In regard to Agassiz, it is just to say that he furnished a vast amount of testimony in favor of the truth of the theories of Charles Darwin, and then denied the correctness of these theories—preferring the good opinion of Harvard for a few days to the lasting applause of the intellectual world.

I agree with you that the world is a mystery, not only, but that everything in Nature is equally mysterious, and that there is no way of escape from the mystery of life and death. To me, the crystallization of the snow is as mysterious as the constellations. But when you endeavor to explain the mystery of the universe by the mystery of God, you do not even exchange mysteries—you simply make one more.

Nothing can be mysterious enough to become an explanation.

The mystery of man cannot be explained by the mystery of God. That mystery still asks for explanation. The mind is so that it cannot grasp the idea of an infinite personality. That is beyond the circumference. This being so, it is impossible that man can be convinced by any evidence of the existence of that which he cannot in any measure comprehend. Such evidence would be equally incomprehensible with the incomprehensible fact sought to be established by it, and the intellect of man can grasp neither the one nor the other.

You admit that the God of Nature—that is to say, your God—is as inflexible as Nature itself. Why should man worship the inflexible? Why should he kneel to the unchangeable? You say that your God “does not bend to human thought any more than to human will,” and that “the more we study him, the more we find that he is not what we imagined him to be.” So that, after all, the only thing you are really certain of in relation to your God is, that he is not what you think he is. Is it not almost absurd to insist that such a state of mind is necessary to salvation, or that it is a moral restraint, or that it is the foundation of social order?

The most religious nations have been the most immoral, the cruelest and the most unjust. Italy was far worse under the Popes than under the Cæsars. Was there ever a barbarian nation more savage than the Spain of the sixteenth century? Certainly you must know that what you call religion has produced a thousand civil wars, and has severed with the sword all the natural ties that produce “the unity and married calm of States.” Theology is the fruitful mother of discord; order is the child of reason. If you will candidly consider this question—if you will for a few moments forget your preconceived opinions—you will instantly see that the instinct of self-preservation holds society together. Religion itself was born of this instinct. People, being ignorant, believed that the Gods were jealous and revengeful. They peopled space with phantoms that demanded worship and delighted in sacrifice and ceremony, phantoms that could be flattered by praise and changed by prayer. These ignorant people wished to preserve themselves. They supposed that they could in this way avoid pestilence and famine, and postpone perhaps the day of death. Do you not see that self-preservation lies at the foundation of worship? Nations, like individuals, defend and protect themselves. Nations, like individuals, have fears, have ideals, and live for the accomplishment of certain ends. Men defend their property because it is of value. Industry is the enemy of theft. Men, as a rule desire to live, and for that reason murder is a crime. Fraud is hateful to the victim. The majority of mankind work and produce the necessities, the comforts, and the luxuries of life. They wish to retain the fruits of their labor. Government is one of the instrumentalities for the preservation of what man deems of value.

This is the foundation of social order, and this holds society together.

Religion has been the enemy of social order, because it directs the attention of man to another world. Religion teaches its votaries to sacrifice this world for the sake of that other. The effect is to weaken the ties that hold families and States together. Of what consequence is anything in this world compared with eternal joy?

You insist that man is not capable of self government, and that God made the mistake of filling a world with failures—in other words, that man must be governed not by himself, but by your God, and that your God produces order, and establishes and preserves all the nations of the earth. This being so, your God is responsible for the government of this world. Does he preserve order in Russia? Is he accountable for Siberia? Did he establish the institution of slavery? Was he the founder of the Inquisition?

You answer all these questions by calling my attention to “the retributions of history.” What are the retributions of history? The honest were burned at the stake; the patriotic, the generous, and the noble were allowed to die in dungeons; whole races were enslaved; millions of mothers were robbed of their babes. What were the retributions of history? They who committed these crimes wore crowns, and they who justified these infamies were adorned with the tiara.

You are mistaken when you say that Lincoln at Gettysburg said: “Just and true are thy judgments, Lord God Almighty.” Something like this occurs in his last inaugural, in which he says, —speaking of his hope that the war might soon be ended,—“If it shall continue until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, still it must be said, ‘The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’” But admitting that you are correct in the assertion, let me ask you one question: Could one standing over the body of Lincoln, the blood slowly oozing from the madman’s wound, have truthfully said: “Just and true are thy judgments, Lord God Almighty?”

Do you really believe that this world is governed by an infinitely wise and good God? Have you convinced even yourself of this? Why should God permit the triumph of injustice? Why

should the loving be tortured? Why should the noblest be destroyed? Why should the world be filled with misery, with ignorance, and with want? What reason have you for believing that your God will do better in another world than he has done and is doing in this? Will he be wiser? Will he have more power? Will he be more merciful?

When I say "your God," of course I mean the God described in the Bible and the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. But again I say, that in the nature of things, there can be no evidence of the existence of an infinite being.

An infinite being must be conditionless, and for that reason there is nothing that a finite being can do that can by any possibility affect the well-being of the conditionless. This being so, men can neither owe nor discharge any debt or duty to an infinite being. The infinite cannot want, and man can do nothing for a being who wants nothing. A conditioned being can be made happy, or miserable, by changing conditions, but the conditionless is absolutely independent of cause and effect.

I do not say that a God does not exist, neither do I say that a God does exist; but I say that I do not know—that there can be no evidence to my mind of the existence of such a being, and that my mind is so that it is incapable of even thinking of an infinite personality. I know that in your creed you describe God as "without body, parts, or passions." This, to my mind, is simply a description of an infinite vacuum. I have had no experience with gods. This world is the only one with which I am acquainted, and I was surprised to find in your letter the expression that "perhaps others are better acquainted with that of which I am so ignorant." Did you, by this, intend to say that you know anything of any other state of existence—that you have inhabited some other planet—that you lived before you were born, and that you recollect something of that other world, or of that other state?

Upon the question of immortality you have done me, unintentionally, a great injustice. With regard to that hope, I have never uttered "a flippant or a trivial" word. I have said a thousand times, and I say again, that the idea of immortality, that, like a sea, has ebbed and flowed in the human heart, with its countless waves of hope and fear beating against the shores and rocks of time and fate, was not born of any book, nor of any creed, nor of any religion. It was born of human affection, and it will

continue to ebb and flow beneath the mists and clouds of doubt and darkness as long as love kisses the lips of death.

I have said a thousand times, and I say again, that we do not know, we cannot say, whether death is a wall or a door—the beginning, or end, of a day—the spreading of pinions to soar, or the folding forever of wings—the rise or the set of a sun, or an endless life, that brings rapture and love to every one.

The belief in immortality is far older than Christianity. Thousands of years before Christ was born billions of people had lived and died in that hope. Upon countless graves had been laid in love and tears the emblems of another life. The heaven of the New Testament was to be in this world. The dead, after they were raised, were to live here. Not one satisfactory word was said to have been uttered by Christ—nothing philosophic, nothing clear, nothing that adorns, like a bow of promise, the cloud of doubt.

According to the account in the New Testament, Christ was dead for a period of nearly three days. After his resurrection, why did not some one of his disciples ask him where he had been? Why did he not tell them what world he had visited? There was the opportunity to “bring life and immortality to light.” And yet he was silent as the grave that he had left—speechless as the stone that angels had rolled away.

How do you account for this? Was it not infinitely cruel to leave the world in darkness and in doubt, when one word could have filled all time with hope and light?

The hope of immortality is the great oak round which have climbed the poisonous vines of superstition. The vines have not supported the oak—the oak has supported the vines. As long as men live and love and die, this hope will blossom in the human heart.

All I have said upon this subject has been to express my hope and confess my lack of knowledge. Neither by word nor look have I expressed any other feeling than sympathy with those who hope to live again—for those who bend above their dead and dream of life to come. But I have denounced the selfishness and heartlessness of those who expect for themselves an eternity of joy, and for the rest of mankind predict, without a tear, a world of endless pain. Nothing can be more contemptible than such a hope—a hope that can give satisfaction only to the hyenas of the human race.

When I say that I do not know—when I deny the existence of perdition, you reply that “there is something very cruel in this treatment of the belief of my fellow creatures.”

You have had the goodness to invite me to a grave over which a mother bends and weeps for her only son. I accept your invitation. We will go together. Do not, I pray you, deal in splendid generalities. Be explicit. Remember that the son for whom the loving mother weeps was not a Christian, not a believer in the inspiration of the Bible nor in the divinity of Jesus Christ. The mother turns to you for consolation, for some star of hope in the midnight of her grief. What must you say? Do not desert the Presbyterian creed. Do not forget the threatenings of Jesus Christ. What must you say? Will you read a portion of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith? Will you read this?

“Although the light of Nature, and the works of creation and Providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave man inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary to salvation.”

Or, will you read this?

“By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”

Suppose the mother, lifting her tear-stained face, should say: “My son was good, generous, loving, and kind. He gave his life for me. Is there no hope for him?” Would you then put this serpent in her breast?

“Men not professing the Christian religion cannot be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to conform their lives according to the light of Nature. We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin. There is no sin so small but that it deserves damnation. Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of that, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others, are sinful and cannot please God or make a man meet to receive Christ or God.”

And suppose the mother should then sobbingly ask: “What has become of my son? Where is he now? Would you still read from your Confession of Faith, or from your Catechism—this?

“The souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. At the last day the righteous shall come into everlasting life, but the wicked shall be cast into eternal torment and punished with everlast-

ing destruction. The wicked shall be cast into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torment, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels, forever."

If the poor mother still wept, still refused to be comforted, would you thrust this dagger in her heart?

"At the Day of Judgment you, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be seated at his right hand there openly acknowledged and acquitted, and you shall join with him in the damnation of your son."

If this failed to still the beatings of her aching heart, would you repeat these words which you say came from the loving soul of Christ?

"They who believe and are baptized shall be saved, and they who believe not shall be damned; and these shall go away into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Would you not be compelled, according to your belief, to tell this mother that "there is but one name given under heaven and among men whereby" the souls of men can enter the gates of Paradise? Would you not be compelled to say: "Your son lived in a Christian land. The means of grace were within his reach. He died not having experienced a change of heart, and your son is forever lost. You can meet your son again only by dying in your sins; but if you will give your heart to God you can never clasp him to your breast again."

What could I say? Let me tell you.

"My dear madam, this reverend gentleman knows nothing of another world. He cannot see beyond the tomb. He has simply stated to you the superstitions of ignorance, of cruelty and fear. If there be in this universe a God, he certainly is as good as you are. Why should he have loved your son in life—loved him, according to this reverend gentleman, to that degree that he gave his life for him; and why should that love be changed to hatred the moment your son was dead?

"My dear woman, there are no punishments, there are no rewards—there are consequences; and of one thing you may rest assured, and that is, that every soul, no matter what sphere it may inhabit, will have the everlasting opportunity of doing right.

"If death ends all, and if this handful of dust over which you weep is all there is, you have this consolation: Your son is not within the power of this reverend gentleman's God—that is something. Your son does not suffer. Next to a life of joy is the dreamless sleep of death."

Does it not seem to you infinitely absurd to call orthodox Christianity "a consolation?" Here in this world, where every human being is enshrouded in cloud and mist,—where all lives are filled with mistakes,—where no one claims to be perfect, is it "a consolation" to say that "the smallest sin deserves eternal pain?" Is it possible for the ingenuity of man to extract from the doctrine of hell one drop, one ray, of "consolation?" If that doctrine be true, is not your God an infinite criminal? Why should he have created uncounted billions destined to suffer forever? Why did he not leave them unconscious dust? Compared with this crime, any crime that man can by any possibility commit is a virtue.

Think for a moment of your God,—the keeper of an infinite penitentiary filled with immortal convicts,—your God an eternal turnkey, without the pardoning power. In the presence of this infinite horror, you complacently speak of the atonement,—a scheme that has not yet gathered within its horizon a billionth part of the human race,—an atonement with one-half the world remaining undiscovered for fifteen hundred years after it was made.

If there could be no suffering, there could be no sin. To unjustly cause suffering is the only possible crime. How can a God accept the suffering of the innocent in lieu of the punishment of the guilty?

According to your theory, this infinite being, by his mere will, makes right and wrong. This I do not admit. Right and wrong exist in the nature of things—in the relation they bear to man, and to sentient beings. You have already admitted that "Nature is inflexible, and that a violated law calls for its consequences." I insist that no God can step between an act and its natural effects. If God exists, he has nothing to do with punishment, nothing to do with reward. From certain acts flow certain consequences; these consequences increase or decrease the happiness of man; and the consequences must be borne.

A man who has forfeited his life to the commonwealth may be pardoned, but a man who has violated a condition of his own well-being cannot be pardoned—there is no pardoning power. The laws of the State are made, and, being made, can be changed; but the facts of the universe cannot be changed. The relation of act to consequence cannot be altered. This is above all power, and, consequently, there is no analogy between the laws of the State and the facts in Nature. An infinite God could

not change the relation between the diameter and circumference of the circle.

A man having committed a crime may be pardoned, but I deny the right of the State to punish an innocent man in the place of the pardoned—no matter how willing the innocent man may be to suffer the punishment. There is no law in Nature, no fact in Nature, by which the innocent can be justly punished to the end that the guilty may go free. Let it be understood once for all: Nature cannot pardon.

You have recognized this truth. You have asked me what is to become of one who seduces and betrays, of the criminal with the blood of his victim upon his hands. Without the slightest hesitation I answer, whoever commits a crime against another must, to the utmost of his power in this world and in another, if there be one, make full and ample restitution, and in addition must bear the natural consequences of his offence. No man can be perfectly happy, either in this world or in any other, who has by his perfidy broken a loving and a confiding heart. No power can step between acts and consequences—no forgiveness, no atonement.

But, my dear friend, you have taught for many years, if you are a Presbyterian, or an evangelical Christian, that a man may seduce and betray, and that the poor victim, driven to insanity, leaping from some wharf at night where ships strain at their anchors in storm and darkness—you have taught that this poor girl may be tormented forever by a God of infinite compassion. This is not all that you have taught. You have said to the seducer, to the betrayer, to the one who would not listen to her wailing cry,—who would not even stretch forth his hand to catch her fluttering garments,—you have said to him: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be happy forever; you shall live in the realm of infinite delight, from which you can, without a shadow falling upon your face, observe the poor girl, your victim, writhing in the agonies of hell. You have taught this. For my part, I do not see how an angel in heaven meeting another angel whom he had robbed on the earth, could feel entirely blissful. I go further. Any decent angel, no matter if sitting at the right hand of God, should he see in hell one of his victims, would leave heaven itself for the purpose of wiping one tear from the cheek of the damned.

You seem to have forgotten your statement in the commencement of your letter, that your God is as inflexible as Nature—that he bends not to human thought nor to human will. You seem to have forgotten the line which you emphasized with italics: “*The effect of everything which is of the nature of a cause, is eternal.*” In the light of this sentence, where do you find a place for forgiveness—for your atonement? Where is a way to escape from the effect of a cause that is eternal? Do you not see that this sentence is a cord with which I easily tie your hands? The scientific part of your letter destroys the theological. You have put “new wine into old bottles,” and the predicted result has followed. Will the angels in heaven, the redeemed of earth, lose their memory? Will not all the redeemed rascals remember their rascality? Will not all the redeemed assassins remember the faces of the dead? Will not all the seducers and betrayers remember her sighs, her tears, and the tones of her voice, and will not the conscience of the redeemed be as inexorable as the conscience of the damned?

If memory is to be forever “the warder of the brain,” and if the redeemed can never forget the sins they committed, the pain and anguish they caused, then they can never be perfectly happy; and if the lost can never forget the good they did, the kind actions, the loving words, the heroic deeds, and if the memory of good deeds gives the slightest pleasure, then the lost can never be perfectly miserable. Ought not the memory of a good action to live as long as the memory of a bad one? So that the undying memory of the good, in heaven, brings undying pain, and the undying memory of those in hell brings undying pleasure. Do you not see that if men have done good and bad, the future can have neither a perfect heaven nor a perfect hell?

I believe in the manly doctrine that every human being must bear the consequences of his acts, and that no man can be justly saved or damned on account of the goodness or the wickedness of another.

If by atonement you mean the natural effect of self-sacrifice, the effects following a noble and disinterested action; if you mean that the life and death of Christ are worth their effect upon the human race,—which your letter seems to show,—then there is no question between us. If you have thrown away the old and barbarous idea that a law had been broken, that God demanded a

sacrifice, and that Christ, the innocent, was offered up for us, and that he bore the wrath of God and suffered in our place, then I congratulate you with all my heart.

It seems to me impossible that life should be exceedingly joyous to any one who is acquainted with its miseries, its burdens, and its tears. I know that as darkness follows light around the globe, so misery and misfortune follow the sons of men. According to your creed, the future state will be worse than this. Here, the vicious may reform; here, the wicked may repent; here, a few gleams of sunshine may fall upon the darkest life. But in your future state, for countless billions of the human race, there will be no reform, no opportunity of doing right, and no possible gleam of sunshine can ever touch their souls. Do you not see that your future state is infinitely worse than this? You seem to mistake the glare of hell for the light of morning.

Let us throw away the dogma of eternal retribution. Let us "cling to all that can bring a ray of hope into the darkness of this life."

You have been kind enough to say that I find a subject for caricature in the doctrine of regeneration. If, by regeneration, you mean reformation,—if you mean that there comes a time in the life of a young man when he feels the touch of responsibility, and that he leaves his foolish or vicious ways, and concludes to act like an honest man,—if this is what you mean by regeneration, I am a believer. But that is not the definition of regeneration in your creed—that is not Christian regeneration. There is some mysterious, miraculous, supernatural, invisible agency, called, I believe, the Holy Ghost, that enters and changes the heart of man, and this mysterious agency is like the wind, under the control, apparently, of no one, coming and going when and whither it listeth. It is this illogical and absurd view of regeneration that I have attacked.

You ask me how it came to pass that a Hebrew peasant born among the hills of Galilee, had a wisdom above that of Socrates or Plato, of Confucius or Buddha, and you conclude by saying, "This is the greatest of miracles—that such a being should live and die on the earth."

I can hardly admit your conclusion, because I remember that Christ said nothing in favor of the family relation. As a matter of fact, his life tended to cast discredit upon marriage. He said

nothing against the institution of slavery; nothing against the tyranny of government; nothing of our treatment of animals; nothing about education, about intellectual progress; nothing of art, declared no scientific truth, and said nothing as to the rights and duties of nations.

You may reply that all this is included in "Do unto others as you would be done by;" and "Resist not evil." More than this is necessary to educate the human race. It is not enough to say to your child or to your pupil, "Do right." The great question still remains: What is right? Neither is there any wisdom in the idea of non-resistance. Force without mercy is tyranny. Mercy without force is but a waste of tears. Take from virtue the right of self-defence, and vice becomes the master of the world.

Let me ask you how it came to pass that an ignorant driver of camels, a man without family, without wealth, became master of hundreds of millions of human beings? How is it that he conquered and overran more than half of the Christian world? How is it that on a thousand fields the banner of the cross went down in blood, while that of the crescent floated in triumph? How do you account for the fact that the flag of this imposter floats to-day above the sepulchre of Christ? Was this a miracle? Was Mohammed inspired? How do you account for Confucius, whose name is known wherever the sky bends? Was he inspired—this man who for many centuries has stood first, and who has been acknowledged the superior of all men by hundreds and thousands of millions of his fellow men? How do you account for Buddha,—in many respects the greatest religious teacher this world has ever known,—the broadest, the most intellectual of them all; he who was great enough, hundreds of years before Christ was born, to declare the universal brotherhood of man, great enough to say that intelligence is the only lever capable of raising mankind? How do you account for him, who has had more followers than any other? Are you willing to say that all success is divine? How do you account for Shakespeare, born of parents who could neither read nor write, held in the lap of ignorance and love, nursed at the breast of poverty—how do you account for him, by far the greatest of the human race, the wings of whose imagination still fill the horizon of human thought; Shakespeare, who was perfectly acquainted with the human heart, knew all depths

of sorrow, all heights of joy, and in whose mind were the fruit of all thought, of all experience, and a prophecy of all to be; Shakespeare, the wisdom and beauty and depth of whose words increase with the intelligence and civilization of mankind? How do you account for this miracle? Do you believe that any founder of any religion could have written "Lear" or "Hamlet?" Did Greece produce a man who could by any possibility have been the author of "Troilus and Cressida?" Was there among all the countless millions of almighty Rome an intellect that could have written the tragedy of "Julius Cæsar?" Is not the play of "Anthony and Cleopatra" as Egyptian as the Nile? How do you account for this man, within whose veins there seemed to be the blood of every race, and in whose brain there were the poetry and philosophy of a world?

You ask me to tell my opinion of Christ. Let me say here, once for all, that for the man Christ—for the man who, in the darkness, cried out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—for that man I have the greatest possible respect. And let me say, once for all, that the place where man has died for man is holy ground. To that great and serene peasant of Palestine I gladly pay the tribute of my admiration and my tears. He was a reformer in his day—an infidel in his time. Back of the theological mask, and in spite of the interpolations of the New Testament, I see a great and genuine man.

It is hard to see how you can consistently defend the course pursued by Christ himself. He attacked with great bitterness "the religion of others." It did not occur to him that "there was something very cruel in this treatment of the belief of his fellow creatures." He denounced the chosen people of God as a "generation of vipers." He compared them to "whited sepulchres." How can you sustain the conduct of missionaries? They go to other lands and attack the sacred beliefs of others. They tell the people of India and of all heathen lands, not only that their religion is a lie, not only that their gods are myths, but that the ancestors of these people—their fathers and mothers who never heard of God, of the Bible, or of Christ—are all in perdition. Is not this a cruel treatment of the belief of a fellow creature?

A religion that is not manly and robust enough to bear attack with smiling fortitude is unworthy of a place in the heart or brain. A religion that takes refuge in sentimentality, that

cries out: "Do not, I pray you, tell me any truth calculated to hurt my feelings," is fit only for asylums.

You believe that Christ was God, that he was infinite in power. While in Jerusalem he cured the sick, raised a few from the dead, and opened the eyes of the blind. Did he do these things because he loved mankind, or did he do these miracles simply to establish the fact that he was the very Christ? If he was actuated by love, is he not as powerful now as he was then? Why does he not open the eyes of the blind now? Why does he not with a touch make the leper clean? If you had the power to give sight to the blind, to cleanse the leper, and would not exercise it, what would be thought of you? What is the difference between one who can and will not cure, and one who causes disease?

Only the other day I saw a beautiful girl—a paralytic, and yet her brave and cheerful spirit shone over the wreck and ruin of her body like morning on the desert. What would I think of myself had I the power by a word to send the blood through all her withered limbs freighted again with life, should I refuse?

Most theologians seem to imagine that the virtues have been produced by and are really the children of religion.

Religion has to do with the supernatural. It defines our duties and obligations to God. It prescribes a certain course of conduct by means of which happiness can be attained in another world. The result here is only an incident. The virtues are secular. They have nothing whatever to do with the supernatural, and are of no kindred to any religion. A man may be honest, courageous, charitable, industrious, hospitable, loving, and pure without being religious—that is to say, without any belief in the supernatural; and a man may be the exact opposite and at the same time a sincere believer in the creed of any church—that is to say, in the existence of a personal God, the inspiration of the Scriptures and in the divinity of Jesus Christ. A man who believes in the Bible may or may not be kind to his family, and a man who is kind and loving in his family may or may not believe in the Bible.

In order that you may see the effect of belief in the formation of character, it is only necessary to call your attention to the fact that your Bible shows that the devil himself is a believer in the existence of your God, in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and

in the divinity of Jesus Christ. He not only believes these things, but he knows them, and yet, in spite of all, he remains a devil still.

Few religions have been bad enough to destroy all the natural goodness in the human heart. In the deepest midnight of superstition some natural virtues, like stars, have been visible in the heavens. Man has committed every crime in the name of Christianity—or at least crimes that involved the commission of all others. Those who paid for labor with the lash, and who made blows a legal tender, were Christians. Those who engaged in the slave trade were believers in a personal God. One slave ship was called "The Jehovah." Those who pursued with hounds the fugitive led by the Northern star prayed fervently to Christ to crown their efforts with success, and the stealers of babes, just before falling asleep, commended their souls to the keeping of the Most High.

As you have mentioned the apostles, let me call your attention to an incident.

You remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The apostles, having nothing themselves, conceived the idea of having all things in common. Their followers who had something were to sell what little they had, and turn the proceeds over to these theological financiers. It seems that Ananias and Sapphira had a piece of land. They sold it, and after talking the matter over, not being entirely satisfied with the collaterals, concluded to keep a little—just enough to keep them from starvation if the good and pious bankers should abscond.

When Ananias brought the money, he was asked whether he had kept back a part of the price. He said that he had not. Whereupon God, the compassionate, struck him dead. As soon as the corpse was removed, the apostles sent for his wife. They did not tell her that her husband had been killed. They deliberately set a trap for her life. Not one of them was good enough or noble enough to put her on her guard; they allowed her to believe that her husband had told his story, and that she was free to corroborate what he had said. She probably felt that they were giving more than they could afford, and, with the instinct of woman, wanted to keep a little. She denied that any part of the price had been kept back. That moment the arrow of divine vengeance entered her heart.

Will you be kind enough to tell me your opinion of the apostles in the light of this story? Certainly murder is a greater crime than mendacity.

You have been good enough, in a kind, fatherly way, to give me some advice. You say that I ought to soften my colors, and that my words would be more weighty if not so strong. Do you really desire that I should add weight to my words? Do you really wish me to succeed? If the commander of one army should send word to the general of the other that his men were firing too high, do you think the general would be misled? Can you conceive of his changing his orders by reason of the message?

I deny that "the Pilgrims crossed the sea to find freedom to worship God in the forests of the new world." They came not in the interest of freedom. It never entered their minds that other men had the same right to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences that the Pilgrims themselves had. The moment they had power they were ready to whip and brand, to imprison and burn. They did not believe in religious freedom. They had no more idea of liberty of conscience than Jehovah.

I do not say that there is no place in the world for heroes and martyrs. On the contrary, I declare that the liberty we now have was won for us by heroes and by martyrs, and millions of these martyrs were burned, or flayed alive, or torn in pieces, or assassinated by the Church of God. The heroism was shown in fighting the hordes of religious superstition.

Giordano Bruno was a martyr. He was a hero. He believed in no God, in no heaven, and in no hell, yet he perished by fire. He was offered liberty on condition that he would recant. There was no God to please, no heaven to expect, no hell to fear, and yet he died by fire, simply to preserve the unstained whiteness of his soul.

For hundreds of years every man who attacked the Church was a hero. The sword of Christianity has been wet for many centuries with the blood of the noblest. Christianity has been ready with whip and chain and fire to banish freedom from the earth.

Neither is it true that "family life withers under the cold sneer—half pity and half scorn—with which I look down on household worship."

Those who believe in the existence of God, and believe that they are indebted to this divine being for the few gleams of sunshine in this life, and who thank God for the little they have enjoyed, have my entire respect. Never have I said one word against the spirit of thankfulness. I understand the feeling of the man who gathers his family about him after the storm, or after the scourge, or after long sickness, and pours out his heart in thankfulness to the supposed God who has protected his fireside. I understand the spirit of the savage who thanks his idol of stone, or his fetich of wood. It is not the wisdom of the one or of the other that I respect, it is the goodness and thankfulness that prompt the prayer.

I believe in the family. I believe in family life; and one of my objections to Christianity is that it divides the family. Upon this subject I have said hundreds of times, and I say again, that the roof-tree is sacred, from the smallest fibre that feels the soft, cool clasp of earth, to the topmost flower that spreads its bosom to the sun, and like a spendthrift gives its perfume to the air. The home where virtue dwells with love is like a lily with a heart of fire, the fairest flower in all this world.

What did Christianity in the early centuries do for the home? What have nunneries and monasteries, and what has the glorification of celibacy done for the family? Do you not know that Christ himself offered rewards in this world and eternal happiness in another to those who would desert their wives and children and follow him? What effect has that promise had upon family life?

As a matter of fact, the family is regarded as nothing. Christianity teaches that there is but one family, the family of Christ, and that all other relations are as nothing compared with that. Christianity teaches the husband to desert the wife, the wife to desert the husband, the children to desert their parents for the miserable and selfish purpose of saving their own little, shrivelled souls.

It is far better for a man to love his fellow men than to love God. It is better to love wife and children than to love Christ. It is better to serve your neighbor than to serve your God—even if God exists. The reason is palpable. You can do nothing for God. You can do something for wife and children. You can add to the sunshine of a life. You can plant flowers in the pathway of another.

It is true that I am an enemy of the orthodox Sabbath. It is true that I do not believe in giving one-seventh of our time to the service of superstition. The whole scheme of your religion can be understood by any intelligent man in one day. Why should he waste a seventh of his whole life in hearing the same thoughts repeated again and again?

Nothing is more gloomy than an orthodox Sabbath. The mechanic who has worked during the week in heat and dust, the laboring man who has barely succeeded in keeping his soul in his body, the poor woman who has been sewing for the rich, may go to the village church which you have described. They answer the chimes of the bell, and what do they hear in this village church? Is it that God is the Father of the human race; is that all? If that were all, you never would have heard an objection from my lips. That is not all. If all ministers said: Bear the evils of this life; your Father in heaven counts your tears; the time will come when "pain" and "death" and "grief" will be forgotten words, I should have listened with the rest. What else does the minister say to the poor people who have answered the chimes of your bell? He says: "The smallest sin deserves eternal pain." "A vast majority of men are doomed to suffer the wrath of God forever." He fills the present with fear and the future with fire. He has heaven for the few, hell for the many. He describes a little grass-grown path that leads to heaven, where travellers are "few and far between," and a great highway worn with countless feet that leads to everlasting death.

Such Sabbaths are immoral. Such ministers are the real savages. Gladly would I abolish such a Sabbath. Gladly would I turn it into a holiday, a day of rest and peace, a day to get acquainted with your wife and children, a day to exchange civilities with your neighbors; and gladly would I see the church in which such sermons are preached changed to a place of entertainment. Gladly would I have the echoes of orthodox sermons—the owls and bats among the rafters, the snakes in crevices and corners—driven out by the glorious music of Wagner and Beethoven. Gladly would I see the Sunday-school, where the doctrine of eternal fire is taught, changed to a happy dance upon the village green.

Music refines. The doctrine of eternal punishment degrades. Science civilizes. Superstition looks longingly back to savagery.

You do not believe that general morality can be upheld without the sanctions of religion.

Christianity has sold, and continues to sell, crime on a credit. It has taught, and it still teaches, that there is forgiveness for all. Of course it teaches morality. It says: "Do not steal, do not murder;" but it adds: "but if you do both, there is a way of escape: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." I insist that such a religion is no restraint. It is far better to teach that there is no forgiveness, and that every human being must bear the consequences of his acts.

The first great step toward national reformation is the universal acceptance of the idea that there is no escape from the consequences of our acts. The young men who come from their country homes into a city filled with temptations, may be restrained by the thought of father and mother. This is a natural restraint. They may be restrained by their knowledge of the fact that a thing is evil on account of its consequences, and that to do wrong is always a mistake. I cannot conceive of such a man being more liable to temptation because he has heard one of my lectures in which I have told him that the only good is happiness—that the only way to attain that good is by doing what he believes to be right. I cannot imagine that his moral character will be weakened by the statement that there is no escape from the consequences of his acts. You seem to think that he will be instantly led astray—that he will go off under the flaring lamps to the riot of passion. Do you think the Bible calculated to restrain him? To prevent this, would you recommend him to read the lives of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, and the other holy polygamists of the Old Testament? Should he read the life of David, and of Solomon? Do you think this would enable him to withstand temptation? Would it not be far better to fill the young man's mind with facts so that he may know exactly the physical consequences of such acts? Do you regard ignorance as the foundation of virtue? Is fear the arch that supports the moral nature of man?

You seem to think that there is danger in knowledge, and that the best chemists are the most likely to poison themselves.

You say that to sneer at religion is only a step from sneering at morality, and then only another step to that which is vicious and profligate.

The Jews entertained the same opinion of the teachings of

Christ. He sneered at their religion. The Christians have entertained the same opinion of every philosopher. Let me say to you again—and let me say it once for all—that morality has nothing to do with religion. Morality does not depend upon the supernatural. Morality does not walk with the crutches of miracles. Morality appeals to the experience of mankind. It cares nothing about faith, nothing about sacred books. Morality depends upon facts, something that can be seen, something known, the product of which can be estimated. It needs no priest, no ceremony, no mummery. It believes in the freedom of the human mind. It asks for investigation. It is founded upon truth. It is the enemy of all religion, because it has to do with this world, and with this world alone.

My object is to drive fear out of the world. Fear is the jailer of the mind. Christianity, superstition—that is to say, the supernatural—makes every brain a prison and every soul a convict. Under the government of a personal deity, consequences partake of the nature of punishments and rewards. Under the government of Nature, what you call punishments and rewards are simply consequences. Nature does not punish. Nature does not reward. Nature has no purpose. When the storm comes, I do not think: "This is being done by a tyrant." When the sun shines, I do not say: "This is being done by a friend." Liberty means freedom from personal dictation. It does not mean escape from the relations we sustain to other facts in Nature. I believe in the restraining influences of liberty. Temperance walks hand in hand with freedom. To remove a chain from the body puts an additional responsibility upon the soul. Liberty says to the man: You injure or benefit yourself; you increase or decrease your own well-being. It is a question of intelligence. You need not bow to a supposed tyrant, or to infinite goodness. You are responsible to yourself and to those you injure, and to none other.

I rid myself of fear, believing as I do that there is no power above which can help me in any extremity, and believing as I do that there is no power above or below that can injure me in any extremity. I do not believe that I am the sport of accident, or that I may be dashed to pieces by the blind agency of Nature. There is no accident, and there is no agency. That which happens must happen. The present is the child of all the past, the mother of all the future.

Does it relieve mankind from fear to believe that there is some God who will help them in extremity? What evidence have they on which to found this belief? When has any God listened to the prayer of any man? The water drowns, the cold freezes, the flood destroys, the fire burns, the bolt of heaven falls—when and where has the prayer of man been answered?

Is the religious world to-day willing to test the efficacy of prayer? Only a few years ago it was tested in the United States. The Christians of Christendom, with one accord, fell upon their knees and asked God to spare the life of one man. You know the result. You know just as well as I that the forces of Nature produce the good and bad alike. You know that the forces of Nature destroy the good and bad alike. You know that the lightning feels the same keen delight in striking to death the honest man that it does or would in striking the assassin with his knife lifted above the bosom of innocence.

Did God hear the prayers of the slaves? Did he hear the prayers of imprisoned philosophers and patriots? Did he hear the prayers of martyrs, or did he allow fiends, calling themselves his followers, to pile the faggots round the forms of glorious men? Did he allow the flames to devour the flesh of those whose hearts were his? Why should any man depend on the goodness of a God who created countless millions, knowing that they would suffer eternal grief?

The faith that you call sacred—"sacred as the most delicate manly or womanly sentiment of love and honor"—is the faith that nearly all of your fellow men are to be lost. Ought an honest man to be restrained from denouncing that faith because those who entertain it say that their feelings are hurt? You say to me: "There is a hell. A man advocating the opinions you advocate will go there when he dies." I answer: "There is no hell. The Bible that teaches it is not true." And you say: "How can you hurt my feelings?"

You seem to think that one who attacks the religion of his parents is wanting in respect to his father and his mother.

Were the early Christians lacking in respect for their fathers and mothers? Were the Pagans who embraced Christianity heartless sons and daughters? What have you to say of the apostles? Did they not heap contempt upon the religion of their fathers and mothers? Did they not join with him who denounced

their people as a "generation of vipers?" Did they not follow one who offered a reward to those who would desert fathers and mothers? Of course you have only to go back a few generations in your family to find a Field who was not a Presbyterian. After that you find a Presbyterian. Was he base enough and infamous enough to heap contempt upon the religion of his father and mother? All the Protestants in the time of Luther lacked in respect for the religion of their fathers and mothers. According to your idea, Progress is a Prodigal Son. If one is bound by the religion of his father and mother, and his father happens to be a Presbyterian and his mother a Catholic, what is he to do? Do you not see that your doctrine gives intellectual freedom only to foundlings?

If by Christianity you mean the goodness, the spirit of forgiveness, the benevolence claimed by Christians to be a part, and the principal part, of that peculiar religion, then I do not agree with you when you say that "Christ is Christianity and that it stands or falls with him." You have narrowed unnecessarily the foundation of your religion. If it should be established beyond doubt that Christ never existed, all that is of value in Christianity would remain, and remain unimpaired. Suppose we should find that Euclid was a myth, the science known as mathematics would not suffer. It makes no difference who painted or chiselled the greatest pictures and statues, so long as we have the pictures and statues. When he who has given the world a truth passes from the earth, the truth is left. A truth dies only when forgotten by the human race. Justice, love, mercy, forgiveness, honor, all the virtues that ever blossomed in the human heart, were known and practised for uncounted ages before the birth of Christ.

You insist that religion does not leave man in "abject terror"—does not leave him "in utter darkness as to his fate."

Is it possible to know who will be saved? Can you read the names mentioned in the decrees of the Infinite? Is it possible to tell who is to be eternally lost? Can the imagination conceive a worse fate than your religion predicts for a majority of the race? Why should not every human being be in "abject terror" who believes your doctrine? How many loving and sincere women are in the asylums to-day fearing that they have committed "the unpardonable sin"—a sin to which your God has

attached the penalty of eternal torment, and yet has failed to describe the offence? Can tyranny go beyond this—fixing the penalty of eternal pain for the violation of a law not written, not known, but kept in the secrecy of infinite darkness? How much happier it is to know nothing about it, and to believe nothing about it! How much better to have no God!

You discover a “Great Intelligence ordering our little lives, so that even the trials that we bear, as they call out the finer elements of character, conduce to our future happiness.” This is an old explanation—probably as good as any. The idea is, that this world is a school in which man becomes educated through tribulation—the muscles of character being developed by wrestling with misfortune. If it is necessary to live this life in order to develop character, in order to become worthy of a better world, how do you account for the fact that billions of the human race die in infancy, and are thus deprived of this necessary education and development? What would you think of a schoolmaster who should kill a large proportion of his scholars during the first day, before they had even had the opportunity to look at A?

You insist that “there is a power behind Nature making for righteousness.”

If Nature is infinite, how can there be a power outside of Nature? If you mean by “a power making for righteousness” that man, as he becomes civilized, as he becomes intelligent, not only takes advantage of the forces of Nature for his own benefit, but perceives more and more clearly that if he is to be happy he must live in harmony with the conditions of his being, in harmony with the facts by which he is surrounded, in harmony with the relations he sustains to others and to things; if this is what you mean, then there is “a power making for righteousness.” But if you mean that there is something supernatural back of Nature directing events, then I insist that there can by no possibility be any evidence of the existence of such a power.

The history of the human race shows that nations rise and fall. There is a limit to the life of a race; so that it can be said of every nation dead, that there was a period when it laid the foundations of prosperity, when the combined intelligence and virtue of the people constituted a power working for righteousness, and that there came a time when this nation became a spendthrift, when it ceased to accumulate, when it lived on the labors of its

youth, and passed from strength and glory to the weakness of old **age**, and finally fell palsied to its tomb.

The intelligence of man guided by a sense of duty is the only power that makes for righteousness.

You tell me that I am waging “a hopeless war,” and you give **as a** reason that the Christian religion began to be nearly two thousand years before I was born, and that it will live two thousand years after I am dead.

Is this an argument? Does it tend to convince even **yourself**? Could not Caiaphas, the high priest, have said substantially this to Christ? Could he not have said: “The religion of Jehovah began to be four thousand years before you were born, and it will live two thousand years after you are dead?” Could not a follower of Buddha make the same illogical remark to a missionary from Andover with the glad tidings? Could he not say: “You are waging a hopeless war. The religion of Buddha began to be twenty-five hundred years before you were born, and hundreds of millions of people still worship at Great Buddha’s shrine?”

Do you insist that nothing except the right can live for two thousand years? Why is it that the Catholic church “lives on and on, while nations and kingdoms perish?” Do you consider that the survival of the fittest?

Is it the same Christian religion now living that lived during the Middle Ages? Is it the same Christian religion that founded the Inquisition and invented the thumb-screw? Do you see no difference between the religion of Calvin and Jonathan Edwards and the Christianity of to-day? Do you really think that it is the same Christianity that has been living all these years? Have you noticed any change in the last generation? Do you remember when scientists endeavored to prove a theory by a passage from the Bible, and do you now know that believers in the Bible are exceedingly anxious to prove its truth by some fact that science has demonstrated? Do you know that the standard has changed? Other things are not measured by the Bible, but the Bible has to submit to another test. It no longer owns the scales. It has to be weighed,—it is being weighed,—it is growing lighter and lighter every day. Do you know that only a few years ago “the glad tidings of great joy” consisted mostly in a description of hell? Do you know that nearly every intelligent minister is now ashamed to preach about it, or to read about it, or to talk

about it? Is there any change? Do you know that but few ministers now believe in "the plenary inspiration" of the Bible, that from thousands of pulpits people are now told that the creation according to Genesis is a mistake, that it never was as wet as the flood, and that the miracles of the Old Testament are considered simply as myths or mistakes?

How long will what you call Christianity endure, if it changes as rapidly during the next century as it has during the last? What will there be left of the supernatural?

It does not seem possible that thoughtful people can, for many years, believe that a being of infinite wisdom is the author of the Old Testament, that a being of infinite purity and kindness upheld polygamy and slavery, that he ordered his chosen people to massacre their neighbors, and that he commanded husbands and fathers to persecute wives and daughters unto death for opinion's sake.

It does not seem within the prospect of belief that Jehovah, the cruel, the jealous, the ignorant, and the revengeful, is the creator and preserver of the universe.

Does it seem possible that infinite goodness would create a world in which life feeds on life, in which everything devours and is devoured? Can there be a sadder fact than this: Innocence is not a certain shield?

It is impossible for me to believe in the eternity of punishment. If that doctrine be true, Jehovah is insane.

Day after day there are mournful processions of men and women, patriots and mothers, girls whose only crime is that the word "Liberty" burst into flower between their pure and loving lips, driven like beasts across the melancholy wastes of Siberian snow. These men, these women, these daughters go to exile and to slavery, to a land where hope is satisfied with death. Does it seem possible to you that an "Infinite Father" sees all this and sits as silent as a god of stone?

And yet, according to your Presbyterian creed, according to your inspired book, according to your Christ, there is another procession, in which are the noblest and best, in which you will find the wondrous spirits of this world, the lovers of the human race, the teachers of their fellow men, the greatest soldiers that ever battled for the right; and this procession of countless millions in which you will find the most generous and the most

loving of the sons and daughters of men, is moving on to the Siberia of God, the land of eternal exile, where agony becomes immortal.

How can you, how can any man with brain or heart, believe this infinite lie?

Is there not room for a better, for a higher philosophy? After all, is it not possible that we may find that everything has been necessarily produced, that all religions and superstitions, all mistakes and all crimes, were simply necessities? Is it not possible that out of this perception may come not only love and pity for others, but absolute justification for the individual? May we not find that every soul has, like Mazeppa, been lashed to the wild horse of passion, or like Prometheus, to the rocks of fate?

You ask me to take the "sober second thought." I beg of you to take the first, and if you do, you will throw away the Presbyterian creed; you will instantly perceive that he who commits the "smallest sin" no more deserves eternal pain than he who does the smallest virtuous deed deserves eternal bliss; you will become convinced that an infinite God who creates billions of men knowing that they will suffer through all the countless years is an infinite demon; you will be satisfied that the Bible, with its philosophy and its folly, with its goodness and its cruelty, is but the work of man, and that the supernatural does not and cannot exist.

For you, personally, I have the highest regard and the sincerest respect, and I beg of you not to pollute the soul of childhood, not to furrow the cheeks of mothers, by preaching a creed that should be shrieked in a mad-house. Do not make the cradle as terrible as the coffin. Preach, I pray you, the gospel of Intellectual Hospitality—the liberty of thought and speech. Take from loving hearts the awful fear. Have mercy on your fellow men. Do not drive to madness the mothers whose tears are falling on the pallid faces of those who died in unbelief. Pity the erring, wayward, suffering, weeping world. Do not proclaim as "tidings of great joy" that an Infinite Spider is weaving webs to catch the souls of men.

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